

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT FORD'S INTERVIEW WITH TEXAS EDITORS,
4/21/76

THE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW ON PANAMA:

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, YOU SAID WHEN YOU WERE IN TEXAS
LAST THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD NEVER GIVE UP, UNDER YOUR
ADMINISTRATION, ITS DEFENSIVE RIGHTS AND ITS NAVIGATIONAL
OPERATIONAL RIGHTS TO THE PANAMA CANAL. THAT SEEMS TO BE
AT VARIANCE WITH THE STATEMENTS MADE BY AMBASSADOR BUNKER
TO THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE PANAMA CANAL.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT AND EXACTLY HOW OPERATIONAL IS YOUR
STATEMENT ABOUT NEVER GIVING UP?

THE PRESIDENT: WELL, I THINK RON INDICATED THAT PERHAPS I
WAS NOT AS PRECISE AS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN. WE WILL NEVER
GIVE UP OUR RIGHTS TO EITHER OPERATE OR TO DEFEND THE CANAL
DURING THE TERM OF ANY TREATY AND ANY TREATY THAT WE SIGN
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WILL BE OF LONG DURATION AND IT WILL BE OF A DURATION THAT

INVOLVES THE ECONOMIC UTILIZATION OF THE CANAL, AND ANY SUCH TREATY WILL EXTEND WELL INTO THE NEXT CENTURY.

QUESTION: MR. PRESIDENT, LET'S TALK POLITICS FOR A SECOND. WE TALKED ABOUT THE PANAMA CANAL. YOUR OPPONENT, MR. REAGAN, HAS MADE A LOT ABOUT DETENTE. IS HE MAKING TOO MUCH OF THE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE? YOU HAVE DR. KISSINGER AND MR. TOWER SAYING THESE ARE ERRONEOUS STATEMENTS AND LET'S COOL IT ON FOREIGN POLICY CRITICISM. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

THE PRESIDENT: ACCORDING TO ALL THE POLLS I HAVE SEEN, THE PUBLIC AS A WHOLE NATIONWIDE BELIEVES THAT OUR FOREIGN POLICY IS SUCCESSFUL. THE POLLS ALSO SHOW THAT WHETHER IT IS DEALING WITH OUR ALLIES OR NEGOTIATING WITH YOUR ADVERSARIES THE FOREIGN POLICY IS A PLUS.

LET ME TAKE EACH OF THESE SEVERAL INSTANCES:

PANAMA -- MY OPPONENT HAS MADE THE STATEMENTS THAT CERTAINLY LED YOU TO THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION THAT IF HE WERE PRESIDENT HE WOULD NOT NEGOTIATE AT ALL UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WITH THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT. HE SPOKE VERY DISRESPECTFULLY OF THE PRESIDENT OF PANAMA AND THE WORDS HE USED WERE "THERE IS NO NEED TO NEGOTIATE AT ALL WITH PANAMA."

LET ME POINT OUT WHAT THE CONCLUSIONS OF THAT ATTITUDE WOULD BE. NUMBER ONE, IT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RESULT IN THE KIND OF BLOODY WARFARE THAT WE HAD IN PANAMA IN 1964-65 -- 20 PANAMANIAN KILLED, FOUR AMERICANS KILLED.

NUMBER TWO, IT WOULD TURN ALL OF SOUTH AND LATIN AMERICA AGAINST THE UNITED STATES -- 24, 25 NATIONS, 309 MILLION PEOPLE IN LATIN AND SOUTH AMERICA -- ALL OF WHOM THINK THERE OUGHT TO BE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA.

AT THE PRESENT TIME, WE HAVE ROUGHLY 10,000 AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN PANAMA. IF THE PROPOSALS OF MY UNCLASSIFIED

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OPPONENT WERE PUT INTO EFFECT -- NO NEGOTIATIONS AND YOU HAD GUERRILLA WARFARE UNDERTAKEN -- YOU WOULD HAVE TO PROBABLY DOUBLE OR TRIPLE THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN PANAMA JUST TO DEFEND THE CANAL TO KEEP IT OPEN.

QUESTION: SIR, COULD I INTERJECT JUST FOR A SECOND? ARE YOU SAYING IF THOSE POLICIES OF MR. REAGAN ARE PURSUED

THAT INEVITABLY IT WILL LEAD TO SOME KIND OF GUERRILLA WARFARE?

THE PRESIDENT: THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT IT. THAT IS

WHAT PRECIPITATED THE 1964-65 INCIDENT THAT RESULTED IN 24 PEOPLE BEING KILLED, INCLUDING FOUR AMERICANS. I THINK THE ATTITUDE IN THIS INSTANCE BY MY OPPONENT IS VERY IRRESPONSIBLE.

THE BETTER PROCEDURE IS THE ONE THAT WAS INITIATED BY PRESIDENT JOHNSON, CARRIED OUT BY HIS SUCCESSOR AND CARRIED ON BY THIS ADMINISTRATION -- NEGOTIATIONS. AND IF THEY ARE NOT COMPLETED, THEY ARE AT LEAST KEEPING THE INCIDENT THAT HAPPENED IN 1964-65 FROM BEING REPEATED. IT IS LEADING, OF COURSE, TO THE CONTINUED SAFE OPERATION OF THE CANAL WITHOUT ANY INCIDENTS.

QUESTION: SIR, DID MR. REAGAN SAY THAT HE WANTED US TO STOP NEGOTIATIONS, OR DID HE JUST SAY HE DIDN'T WANT US TO GIVE UP THE PANAMA CANAL?

THE PRESIDENT: IT WAS A PRETTY CATEGORICAL STATEMENT AND UNDER THE THINGS HE SAID THERE IS NOTHING TO NEGOTIATE. ISN'T THAT RIGHT? THAT IS THE WAY I READ IT: "THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO NEGOTIATE. WE BOUGHT IT, WE BUILT IT, WE ARE GOING TO KEEP IT. THERE IS NOTHING TO NEGOTIATE, SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL HAVE NO NEGOTIATIONS." IF YOU HAVE NO NEGOTIATIONS, THEN YOU INEVITABLY GO BACK TO THE THINGS THAT I INDICATED BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED, THAT IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN, AND I DON'T THINK WE WANT TO BE PUT IN THE POSITION OF PRECIPITATING THE BLOOD BATH THAT WE HAD IN 1964-65.

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THE ALIENATION OF THE WHOLE OF LATIN AND SOUTH AMERICA, THE NEED TO SEND MORE U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL DOWN THERE TO PROTECT IT -- THOSE ARE JUST IRRESPONSIBLE ACTS. KISSINGER

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